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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000521

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR DAS KENNEDY, DRL/MLA, WHA/CCA, IO/SHA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/24/2015

TAGS: PHUM PREL CU AM CHR

SUBJECT: CHR-61: FM OSKANIAN SUGGESTS "LIMITED OPTIONS" ON BELARUS

REF: A. A) EUR 3/23 E-MAIL

B. B) STATE 49957

C. C) YEREVAN 449

Classified By: Ambassador John M. Evans for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Per instructions in ref A, Ambassador Evans met with FM Vartan Oskanian March 24 to ask the GOAM to rethink its position on a no-action motion on Belarus at the UN Commission on Human Rights. Oskanian said the GOAM would give "serious consideration" to our request given the emphasis the USG was placing on the issue. He characterized the situation, however, as one of "limited options." He said that the issue posed a problem of "mutual solidarity as Belarus traditionally sides with our causes (read: Nagorno-Karabakh) in international fora." Oskanian is aware that DAS Kennedy will likely call him today on the issue and pledged to raise the issue with President Robert Kocharian personally. On Cuba, Oskanian indicated that the GOAM position had not changed. Oskanian's advisors said that he had personally reviewed the draft resolution we delivered earlier this week and told Armenia's mission in Geneva that "Armenia will be with the USG" on the Cuba vote. End Summary.

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OSKANIAN SUGGESTS NOT MUCH LATITUDE ON BELARUS  
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¶2. (C) Per instructions in ref A, Ambassador Evans met with FM Vartan Oskanian March 24 to ask the GOAM to re-think its position on a no-action motion on Belarus at the UN Commission on Human Rights. Oskanian said the GOAM would give "serious consideration" to our request and pledged to raise the issue with President Robert Kocharian personally. He noted the particular emphasis the USG was placing on the issue this year. He characterized the situation, however, as one of "limited options." He said that the issue posed a problem of "mutual solidarity as Belarus traditionally sides with our causes (read: Nagorno-Karabakh) in international fora."

¶3. (C) The Ambassador made the additional point that debate on important issues like this should not be stifled by no-action motions and noted Armenia's stated opposition -- at least in principle -- to no-action motions in the past. Oskanian suggested that had Armenia been more consistent in staying away from no-action motions at UNCHR, the GOAM could at a minimum justify abstaining on the no-action motion on procedural grounds. Oskanian tasked his staff to make an inventory of previous no-action motions and present him the information before taking the issue to President Kocharian.

¶4. (C) MFA International Organizations Chief Valery Mkrtumyan told us following the meeting that the MFA had received reports that the UNCHR Special Rapporteur on Belarus was making "problematic" statements regarding the issue of national identity in Belarus that appeared to undermine the integrity of his report. He said that the GOAM's sense was that such language, or at least the rumors about such language, could strengthen Belarus's case for a no-action motion.

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STILL WITH US ON CUBA  
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¶5. (C) On Cuba, Oskanian indicated that their position had not changed. Oskanian's advisors said that he had personally reviewed the draft resolution we delivered earlier this week and told Armenia's mission in Geneva that "Armenia will be with the USG" on the Cuba vote. MFA Senior Advisor Salpi Ghazarian (Amcit) told Poloff that "we heard the message" on Cuba. While she would not comment on the prospect of co-sponsoring, she assured us that we could count on the GOAM's support but also suggested that USG and GOAM officials in Geneva continue to touch base on the issue during the lead-up to the voting to ensure "full information sharing" as things progress.

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COMMENT

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¶6. (C) It was clear from Oskanian's comments that, before our demarche, he and his staff as well as the GOAM mission in Geneva did not feel a sense of urgency on the Belarus issue. Our meeting and the promise of a call from Washington appears to have changed that perception. Oskanian clearly views Belarus's conditional support for "Armenia's" issues including Nagorno-Karabakh as a serious limitation. Engaging the Armenians on purely procedural grounds appears to leave us some room for dialogue.

EVANS